

THE DILEMMA OF RED NOSE DAY

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Can activities based around Red Nose Day help or undermine pupils with special educational needs and disabilities to 'read their world'? Tracy reflects on her experiences at a London Special School.

In his writings on 'critical literacy', the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire (1970) made a distinction between 'reading the word' and 'reading the world'. This distinction is useful when planning inclusive global learning experiences for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) (see web panel). It suggests an entitlement, for all learners, to opportunities to develop greater awareness of what is going on around them. In the context of the current UK SEND Code of Practice, this can be supported by the 'aspirational outcomes' within an Education, Health and Care plan (EHC), which classroom teachers play a role in delivering.

Learning around the topic of 'Comic Relief' can represent an effective way of supporting pupils with SEND to 'read their world'. At the all-age special school where I work (Swiss Cottage in London – see web panel), Red Nose Day has enabled pupils with complex learning difficulties and disabilities to start to make sense of all the associated hype, which they are likely to have encountered on advertising hoardings

in their locality and on television at home. It has also supported personal learning intentions around active participation, linked to those 'aspirational outcomes' within EHC Plans.

However, in my experience, Red Nose Day celebrations in schools can easily slip into being anything but 'education'. Rather than challenge stereotypical representations of people in need, for example, it can perpetuate them; rather than facilitate pupil reflection on global poverty, it can shut dialogues down. Fundraising activities for Red Nose Day I have encountered have not always necessarily offered pupils a challenge. At their worst, such events can regress into activities whereby pupils (in both special and mainstream schools) simply 'colour-in' posters whose content they do not understand.

Therefore, it is important that in planning for Red Nose Day for pupils with SEND we personalise work around the 'aspirational outcomes' and/or individual needs of each learner. At Swiss Cottage, the different activities developed for Red Nose Day represent the diversity of our population and the different priority learning intentions for different pupils in our school.

Pen-portraits

Here, I outline what learning around Red Nose Day might look like for three distinct Year 5 learners. These pen-portraits derive from the experience of schools within our School Alliance. (All names have been changed.)

Johnson

Johnson has a diagnosis of autism and moderate learning difficulties. He transitioned from a local mainstream primary school at the end of year 2, following a series of exclusions for 'disruptive behaviour'. Johnson is working at around age-related expectations for numeracy. Although he is able to read, he has difficulties with written and spoken expression, often relying on a limited bank of stock phrases from Disney films to communicate. In school, Johnson likes to 'play pranks' on other learners, which often imitate those he sees in cartoons. Rather than find them 'funny', he laughs out of a sense that 'this is what I need to do for people to like me'.

As part of Red Nose Day, Johnson was presented with a range of images to produce his own personal story book on what 'is' and 'is not' funny. Some of these images were from his immediate experience of his classmates in school. Other images represented children around the world and some of the causes being supported by Red Nose Day. In a small group with other learners, he worked with a teaching assistant to discuss how something that is sad cannot also be funny. He reflected on incidents that happened in the playground and within his classroom, and on how the children in the images taken in sub-Saharan Africa might be negotiating similar difficulties.

Johnson was then given a 'graphic organiser' to organise his thoughts about Red Nose Day, before writing about it.



The different activities developed for Red Nose Day represent the diversity of our population and the different priority learning intentions for different pupils. Photo © urbanbuzz/Shutterstock.com.

In doing this, he was able to connect the local and the global through comments such as ‘the boy and girl [in the picture] need to write in full sentences too’.

Marta

Marta’s family came to the United Kingdom from Poland when she was a small baby. She has a rare chromosomal difference, which impacts on her learning and development. She also has cerebral palsy and needs support with things such as dressing and undressing. Marta can read 3-4 familiar words (such as cat), which she has memorised. She can count up to six, with support, but has difficulties in recognising and reading numbers. Marta has limited speech, but can communicate using Makaton signing. She had heard of Comic Relief from her brother and sister, who attended a Red Nose Day disco at their mainstream primary school.

Making healthy snacks to sell around the school gave Marta a valuable opportunity to practice her fine motor skills, for example, holding a spoon, adding and mixing ingredients together. She was able to ask staff and visitors if they would like a snack and wait to receive a paid donation. Marta was shown pictures of children that the money raised will be going to, along with images for a ball and a water tray. We asked ‘What new things might the children in the photo choose to have?’ and ‘What would you choose?’ This established a sense that Red Nose Day is about giving and that many of the recipients are other children, just like Marta.

Rumaisa

Rumaisa was born at 24 weeks gestation and has a diagnosis of profound and multiple learning difficulties. A range of sensory, physical and medical barriers limit the proportion of time that Rumaisa is awake and ‘present’ in a learning situation. She is visually impaired, has epilepsy and does not appear to have intentional communication. This means that it is difficult for adults in the classroom to detect whether Rumaisa is unhappy or in pain. She is working on a range of developmental milestones from the assessment framework ‘Routes for Learning’ (DFS Wales) such as ‘responding to own name’.

On Red Nose Day, Rumaisa was able to access a range of multi-sensory learning activities related to the colour red. Red lighting was projected onto bubble wrap on the floor of the dance studio. Rumaisa was hoisted out of her wheelchair to interact with this, and clearly enjoyed hearing the popping sound of the bubbles. A dark umbrella was decorated with lights, which Rumaisa was able to stare and smile at. Photos of her enjoying these activities were sent home, enabling her family to discuss her involvement in Red Nose Day alongside that of her two sisters from another local mainstream school.

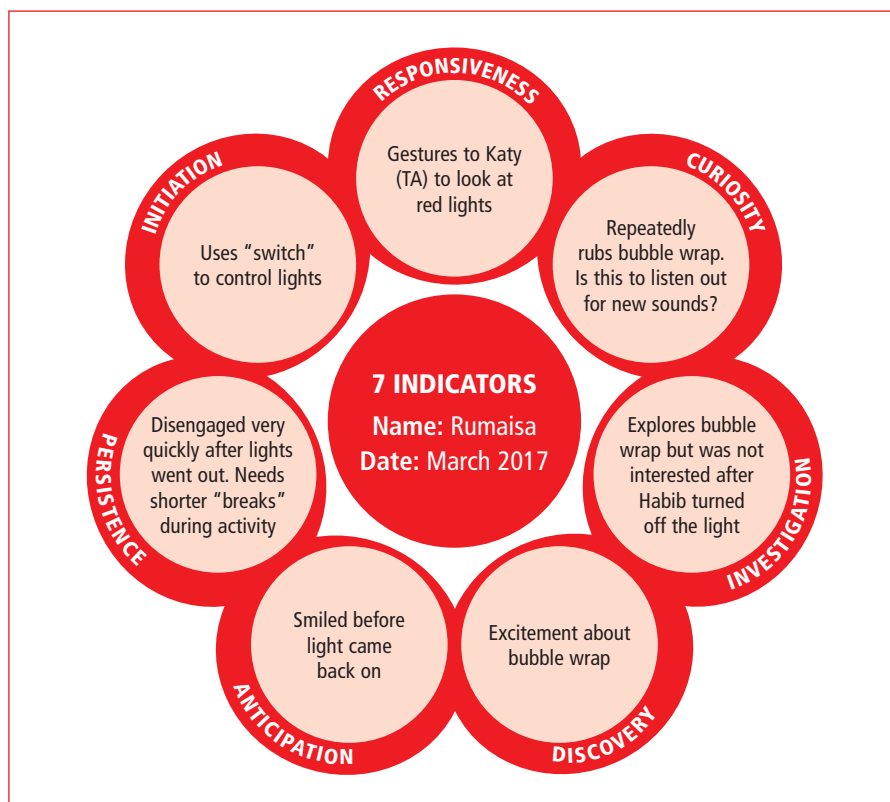


Figure 1: The Engagement Profile and Scale emerged from the Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities research project (see web panel, and Edwards and Hunt, 2018).

The Engagement Profile and Scale was used to assess and evaluate these activities. This enabled practitioners to observe Rumaisa’s engagement around seven indicators: responsiveness, curiosity, investigation, discovery, anticipation, initiation and persistence (Figure 1). See weblinks for further information.

Conclusion

The above activities highlight how, when planned carefully, Red Nose Day can support inclusive global learning for pupils with SEND.

One of the aims of the DfID-supported Global Learning Programme was to move practice beyond a charity mentality towards a social justice mindset. Our examples show that this aim needs to be meaningfully translated for those pupils who may not have the developmental readiness to critically engage with the structural causes of poverty. Having a social justice mentality also needs to begin with our pupils, enabling them to be someone who transcends others’ stereotypes around disability.

Instead of starting with a geography or Global Learning curriculum and finding ways to differentiate it, the three pen portraits indicate how we start with the pupil themselves:

- What is the vision for them as adults (aspirational outcomes)?
- What do they need to learn to be participative global citizens?

Rather than be seen as undermining Global Learning, Red Nose Day may here be central to it; helping a school to enable pupils to ‘read their world’.

References

- Edwards, T. and Hunt, F. (2018) *Global learning for pupils with special educational needs: DERC Research Paper for the GLP*. London: UCL Institute of Education.
- Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin Books.

WEB RESOURCES

- Framework for Inclusive Global Learning: <https://thesendhub.co.uk/a-framework-for-inclusive-global-learning/>
- Engagement Profile and Scale: <https://thesendhub.co.uk/the-cldd-research-project/>
- Red Nose Day at Swiss Cottage video: <https://thesendhub.co.uk/making-smscd-special-why-we-celebrate-red-nose-day/>

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